Pearson Level 3 Alternative Academic Qualification BTEC National Specification Supplementary Information

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Issue 2

About Pearson

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Summary of changes to Specification Supplementary Information Issue 1

Summary of changes made between previous issue and this issue	Page number
Guidance on student use of artificial intelligence in internal assessments added.	9

If you need further information on these changes or what they mean, please contact us via our website at: qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/contact-us.html.

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Scope of this document

This issue of the Pearson Level 3 Alternative Academic Qualification BTEC Nationals Specification Supplementary Information applies to the below qualifications.

- Pearson Level 3 Alternative Academic Qualification BTEC National in Applied Science (Extended Certificate) (610/3965/2)
- Pearson Level 3 Alternative Academic Qualification BTEC National in Computing (Extended Certificate) (610/3963/9)
- Pearson Level 3 Alternative Academic Qualification BTEC National in Construction and the Built Environment (Extended Certificate) (610/3959/7)
- Pearson Level 3 Alternative Academic Qualification BTEC National in Early Childhood Development (Extended Certificate) (610/3966/4)
- Pearson Level 3 Alternative Academic Qualification BTEC National in Engineering (Extended Certificate) (610/3962/7)
- Pearson Level 3 Alternative Academic Qualification BTEC National in Information Technology (Extended Certificate) (610/3960/3)
- Pearson Level 3 Alternative Academic Qualification BTEC National in Health and Social Care (Extended Certificate) (610/3964/0)
- Pearson Level 3 Alternative Academic Qualification BTEC National in Medical Science (Extended Certificate) (610/3958/5)

This document is supplementary to, and should be read alongside, the specifications for the above qualifications (available on our website).

1 Assessment structure and external assessment

Introduction

BTEC Nationals are assessed using a combination of *internal assessments* (which are set by Pearson, marked by teachers and externally verified by Pearson), and *external assessments* which are set and marked by Pearson:

- mandatory units have either internal or external assessments
- all optional units are internally assessed.

We have taken great care to ensure that the assessment method chosen is appropriate to the content of the unit and in line with requirements from higher education.

In developing an overall plan for delivery and assessment for the programme, you will need to consider the order in which you deliver units, whether delivery is over short or long periods and when assessment can take place. Some units have synoptic links to other units (see *Specification* for further details*)*. Normally, a synoptic assessment is one that a student would take later in a programme and in which they will be able to apply learning from at least one other unit. For the assessment in these qualifications that feature synopticity, assessment of at least one learning aim in the synoptic unit allows opportunity to draw on underpinning knowledge (content) from at least one of the other units. The synoptic unit has its own content, and the assessment predominantly targets this content, but additional knowledge can be drawn from other unit(s). This link encourages students to make connections between the content and their learning in different units and help them to synthesise their understanding of concepts. This synoptic links between units are explicitly shown in the specification to support centres in assessing the response to the Pearson Set Assignment Brief.

We have addressed the need to ensure that the time allocated to final assessment of internal and external units is reasonable so that there is sufficient time for teaching and learning, formative assessment and development of transferable skills.

In administering internal and external assessment, the centre needs to be aware of the specific procedures and policies that apply, for example to registration, entries and results. An overview with signposting to relevant documents is given in *Section 3*.

This specification supplementary information should be used in conjunction with the individual subject specification documents.

Internal assessment

Internally assessed units are assessed by a Pearson Set Assignment Brief (PSAB), which is set by Pearson, marked by you and subject to external standards verification. Before teaching, learning and assessment takes place, you will need to become an approved centre, if you are not one already. You will need to prepare to assess using the guidance in *Section 3.* You will make grading decisions based on the assessment criteria and essential information given in the units. Where a student has not achieved their expected level of performance for an assignment, they may be eligible for one resubmission of improved evidence for each assignment submitted if authorised by the Lead Internal Verifier. To ensure any resubmissions are fairly and consistently implemented for all students, the Lead Internal Verifier can only authorise a resubmission if certain conditions are met.

If the Lead Internal Verifier does authorise a resubmission, it must be completed within 15 working days of the student receiving the results of the assessment.

Feedback to students can only be given to clarify areas where they have not achieved expected levels of performance. Students cannot receive any specific guidance or instruction about how to improve work to meet assessment criteria or be given solutions to questions or problems in the tasks.

If a student has still not achieved the targeted pass criteria following the resubmission of improved evidence for an assignment, the Lead Internal Verifier may authorise, under exceptional circumstances, one retake opportunity to meet the required pass criteria. The retake can be of a task or subset of the Pearson Set Assignment Brief that requires evidence to be submitted in a new or revised form. The deadline for submission of the retake must fall within the same academic year.

External assessment

A summary of the external assessment for each qualification is given in each specification. You should check this information carefully, together with the unit specification and the SAMs, so that you can timetable learning and assessment periods appropriately.

Students must be prepared for all external assessment by the time they undertake them. In preparing students for assessment, you will want to take account of required learning time, the relationship with other external assessments and opportunities for retaking. You should ensure that students are not entered for unreasonable amounts of external assessment in one session. Students may resit an external assessment to obtain a higher grade of near pass or above. If a student has more than one attempt, then the best result will be used for qualification grading, up to the permitted maximum. It is unlikely that students will need to or benefit from taking all assessments twice so you are advised to plan appropriately. Some assessments have synoptic links to other units and students are likely to perform best if these assessments are taken towards the end of the programme.

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Externally assessed units

The content of externally assessed units will be sampled across external assessments over time through appropriate papers. The ways in which students are assessed are shown through the assessment outcomes and grading descriptors. External assessments are marked and awarded using the grade descriptors. The grades available are Distinction (D), Merit (M), Pass (P) and Near Pass (N). The Near Pass (N) grade gives students credit below a Pass, where they have demonstrated evidence of positive performance which is worth more than an unclassified result but not yet at the Pass standard.

Sample assessment materials

Each externally assessed unit has a set of sample assessment materials (SAMs) that accompanies each specification. The SAMs are there to give you an example of what the external assessment will look like in terms of the feel and level of demand of the assessment. In the case of units containing synoptic assessment, the SAMs will also show where students are expected to select and apply from across the programme.

The SAMs show the range of possible question types that may appear in the actual assessments and give you a good indication of how the assessments will be structured. While SAMs can be used for practice with students, the content covered, and specific details of the questions asked will change in each assessment.

A copy of each of these assessments can be downloaded from our website.

If students are permitted to use a calculator in the external assessment, this will be indicated on the front of the examination paper. This calculator must comply with JCQ regulations.

2 Internal assessment

This section gives an overview of the key features of internal assessment and how you, as an approved centre, can offer it effectively. The full requirements and operational information will be given in the Alternative Academic Qualifications Guide to Quality Assurance. All members of the assessment team need to refer to this document.

For BTEC Nationals it is important that you can meet the expectations of stakeholders and the needs of students by providing a programme that is practical and applied.

When internal assessment is operated effectively it is challenging, engaging, practical and up to date. It must also be fair to all students and meet national standards.

Principles of internal assessment

Assessment through Pearson Set Assignment Briefs (PSAB)

For internally assessed units, students will complete a Pearson Set Assignment Brief (PSAB) after the relevant content has been taught. These assignments can take various forms, including practical and written tasks. Each PSAB is an independent activity that students complete on their own, separate from regular class activities and practice sessions.

A PSAB is issued to students with a defined start date and completion date determined by the centre, and clear requirements for the evidence that they need to provide. Each PSAB may be undertaken across multiple sittings. There may be specific observed practical components during the assignment period. PSABs are divided into tasks and may require several forms of evidence. PSABs will enable a clear and formal assessment outcome based on the assessment criteria.

No adaptation or contextualisation of PSABs is permitted.

PSABs will be issued for each internally assessed unit. For each unit there may be a single PSAB that will be required for the lifetime of the qualification, or a bank of PSAB versions of which students undertake one.

Units requiring practical demonstration of skills typically have a single PSAB. However, for units comprising knowledge-based outcomes, a bank of more than one PSAB version has been produced to mitigate predictability year-on-year.

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The table below shows which units have a single PSAB, and which units have a bank.

Qualification	Unit number	PSABs (single or bank)
Pearson Level 3 Alternative Academic Qualification BTEC National in Applied Science (Extended Certificate)	4	Single PSAB
	5	Single PSAB
	6	Bank
Pearson Level 3 Alternative Academic Qualification BTEC National in Computing (Extended Certificate)	3	Bank
	4	Bank
Pearson Level 3 Alternative Academic Qualification BTEC National in Construction and the Built Environment (Extended Certificate)	3	Bank
	4	Bank
	5	Single PSAB
	6	Bank
Pearson Level 3 Alternative Academic Qualification BTEC National in Early Childhood Development (Extended Certificate)	3	Bank
	4	Bank
Pearson Level 3 Alternative Academic Qualification BTEC National in Engineering (Extended Certificate)	3	Bank
	4	Bank
Pearson Level 3 Alternative Academic Qualification BTEC National in Information Technology (Extended Certificate)	3	Bank
	4	Bank
Pearson Level 3 Alternative Academic Qualification BTEC National in Health and Social Care (Extended Certificate)	3	Bank
	4	Bank
	5	Bank
	6	Bank
	7	Bank

Where there is a bank of PSAB versions for a given unit:

- centres must ensure that the Pearson Set Assignment Brief versions are allocated at cohort level, with all students in a given academic year being allocated the same version.
- centres must ensure that these versions are changed each year, moving through all of the versions available before any are repeated.
- centres are permitted to choose the order that the versions are administered.

Centres will be required to indicate on their assessment plans the version of PSAB being used with each cohort.

PSABs will be hosted on the secure area of the Pearson website. As they will be used for the for the lifetime of the qualification, centres are advised to check and ensure they are using the latest version of the PSAB at the beginning of each academic year. If a change is made to any version, centres will be notified of the change.

Assessment decisions through applying unit-based criteria

Assessment decisions for BTEC Nationals are based on the specific criteria given in each unit and set at each grade level. To ensure that standards are consistent in the qualification and across the suite as a whole, the criteria for each unit have been defined according to a framework. The way in which individual units are written provides a balance of assessment of understanding, practical skills and vocational attributes appropriate to the purpose of qualifications.

The assessment criteria for a unit are hierarchical and holistic. For example, if an M criterion requires the student to show 'analysis' and the related P criterion requires the student to 'explain', then to satisfy the M criterion a student will need to cover both 'explain' and 'analyse'. The unit assessment grid shows the relationships among the criteria so that assessors can apply all the criteria to the student's evidence at the same time. In each specification we have set out a definition of terms that assessors need to understand.

Assessors must show how they have reached their decisions using the criteria in their assessment records. When a student has completed all the assessment for a unit then the assessment team will give a grade for the unit. This is given simply according to the highest level for which the student is judged to have met all the criteria. Therefore:

- to achieve a Distinction, a student must have satisfied all the Distinction criteria (and therefore the Pass and Merit criteria); these define outstanding performance across the unit as a whole
- to achieve a Merit, a student must have satisfied all the Merit criteria (and therefore the Pass criteria) through high performance in each learning aim
- to achieve a Pass, a student must have satisfied all the Pass criteria for the learning aims, showing coverage of the unit content and therefore attainment at Level 3 of the national framework.

The award of a Pass is a defined level of performance and cannot be given solely on the basis of a student completing assignments. Students who do not satisfy the Pass criteria should be reported as Unclassified.

The assessment team

It is important that there is an effective team for internal assessment. There are three key roles involved in implementing assessment processes in your centre, each with different interrelated responsibilities; the roles are listed below. Full information will be given in the Alternative Academic Qualifications Guide to Quality Assurance.

- The Lead Internal Verifier (the Lead IV) has overall responsibility for the programme, its assessment and internal verification to meet our requirements, record keeping and liaison with the Standards Verifier. The Lead IV acts as an assessor, supports the rest of the assessment team, makes sure that they have the information they need about our assessment requirements and organises training, making use of our guidance and support materials.
- Internal Verifiers (IVs) oversee all assessment activity in consultation with the Lead IV. They check that assessment decisions are valid and that they meet our requirements. IVs will be standardised by working with the Lead IV. Normally, IVs are also assessors but they do not verify their own assessments.
- Assessors use PSABs to assess students to national standards. Before making any assessment decisions, assessors participate in standardisation activities led by the Lead IV. They work with the Lead IV and IVs to ensure that the assessment is planned and carried out in line with our requirements.

Effective organisation

Internal assessment needs to be well organised so that the progress of students can be tracked and so that we can monitor that assessment is being carried out in line with national standards. We support you by providing training materials and sample documentation.

It is particularly important that you manage the overall assessment plan and deadlines to make sure that students are able to complete assignments on time.

Student preparation

To ensure that you provide effective assessment for your students, you need to make sure that they understand their responsibilities for assessment and the centre's arrangements.

From induction onwards, you will want to ensure that students are motivated to work consistently and independently to achieve the requirements of the qualifications. Students need to understand how assignments are used, the importance of meeting assignment deadlines, and that all the work submitted for assessment must be their own.

You will need to give students a guide that explains how assignments are used for assessment, how assignments relate to the teaching programme, and how students should use and reference source materials, including what would constitute plagiarism and AI misuse. The guide should also set out your approach to operating assessment, such as how students must submit work and request extensions.

Forms of evidence

BTEC Nationals have always allowed for a variety of forms of evidence to be used, provided that they are suited to the type of learning aim being assessed. For many units, the practical demonstration of skills is necessary and for others, students will need to carry out their own research and analysis. The PSAB defines the forms of evidence, but a choice of formats is often given to enable students to select a format that is most appropriate for them. Where students have to include specific evidence, for example if they have to produce a physical product or use a certain software, this is made clear in the PSAB.

These are some of the types of evidence:

- written reports
- projects
- time-constrained practical assessments with observation records and supporting evidence
- recordings of performance
- sketchbooks, working logbooks, reflective journals
- presentations with assessor questioning.

If a choice is given, the form(s) of evidence selected must:

- allow the student to provide all the evidence required for the learning aim(s) and the associated assessment criteria at all grade levels
- allow the student to produce evidence that is their own independent work
- allow a standards verifier to independently reassess the student to check the assessor's decisions.

For example, when you are using performance evidence, you need to think about how supporting evidence can be captured through recordings, photographs or task sheets.

Centres need to take particular care that students are enabled to produce independent work. For example, if students are asked to use real examples, then best practice would be to encourage them to use their own.

For some qualifications, students may submit digital evidence, for example, using live web links or development platforms. When this is the case, it is important that both the centre assessment team, and Pearson assessment team, including the standards verifiers and examiners, can access the materials without needing to provide personal information i.e. an email address. It is also important that there is no personal student information that is not essential for assessment. Centres must ensure that appropriate access is provided and there is no requirement for either the Pearson assessment team, including the standards verifiers and examiners, or students to share personal information.

Evidence should only be accessible to those responsible for assessing the work and should not be made publicly available or shared (e.g. on social media) at any point i.e. before, during and after the assessment and verification period

Level of control

Assignments are permitted to be taken under low control – where tasks are completed without direct supervision – unless otherwise stated on the PSAB. This could be due to safety reasons when undertaking practical work, to ensure appropriate software is used, or to mitigate against malpractice. However, centres must ensure that there is sufficient supervision of students to enable work to be authenticated.

Artificial intelligence (AI) requirements

The JCQ Guidance published on the use of AI states that "all work submitted for qualification assessments must be the students' own." This means ensuring that the student's submission is their own work, and is not copied, paraphrased, or heavily derived from another source, including content produced by AI tools. Both teacher and student are required to sign a declaration to this effect.

AI tools may be used appropriately as part of students' work provided that the final submissions are their own. This means both ensuring that the final product/outcome is in their own words and that the content reflects their own efforts. Students are expected to demonstrate their own knowledge, skills and understanding as required for the qualification in question and set out in the qualification specification. If students use AI tools, it must be clearly referenced in their submissions. Teachers must acknowledge and recognise this when applying the assessment criteria. Providers of the qualification must ensure that any AI use is acceptable, appropriate and referenced before the work is submitted.

A student will have committed malpractice if they use AI tools without making appropriate references and in such a way that the work they submit is not their own. Where teachers have doubts about the authenticity of the work, they must investigate and take appropriate action. For further information on malpractice, see *Section 3*.

When marking student work that acknowledges AI use and demonstrates no misuse, assessors must ensure students are not rewarded if they haven't independently met the marking criteria. Depending upon the marking criteria or grade descriptors, assessors may need to consider the failure to independently demonstrate understanding of certain aspects when determining the appropriate mark or grade. For example, where AI tools replace independent thoughts and ideas, independent decision-making, or the independent application of technical skills, they cannot be rewarded for it, even where the AI tools have been referenced. Clear records should be kept, especially if AI use impacts the final marks or grades, to provide feedback to the student and clarity in case of an internal appeal or the work being selected for moderation/standards verification.

Making valid assessment decisions

Authenticity of student work

Once an assessment has begun, students must not be given feedback on progress towards fulfilling the targeted criteria.

An assessor must assess only student work that is authentic, i.e. students' own independent work. Students must authenticate the evidence that they provide for assessment through signing a declaration stating that it is their own work.

Assessors must ensure that evidence is authentic to a student. Assessors must take care not to provide direct input, instructions or specific feedback that may compromise authenticity.

Assessors must complete a declaration that:

- the evidence submitted for this assignment is the student's own
- the student has clearly referenced any sources used in the work
- they understand that false declaration is a form of malpractice.

Centres can use Pearson templates or their own templates to document authentication.

During assessment, an assessor may suspect that some or all of the evidence from a student is not authentic. The assessor must then take appropriate action using the centre's policies for malpractice.

Making assessment decisions using criteria

Assessors make judgements using the criteria. The evidence from a student can be judged using all the relevant criteria at the same time. The assessor needs to make a judgement against each criterion that evidence is present and sufficiently comprehensive. For example, the inclusion of a concluding section may be insufficient to satisfy a criterion requiring 'evaluation'.

Assessors should use the following information and support in reaching assessment decisions:

- the *Essential information for assessment decisions* section in each unit gives examples and definitions related to terms used in the criteria
- the glossary of terms in *Appendix 1* of the specification
- your Lead IV and assessment team's collective experience, supported by the standardisation materials we provide.

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Pass and Merit criteria relate to individual learning aims. The Distinction criteria as a whole relate to outstanding performance across the unit. Therefore, criteria may relate to one learning aim (for example A.D1) or to several learning aims (for example DE.D3). Distinction criteria make sure that students have shown that they can perform consistently at an outstanding level across the unit and/or that they are able to draw learning together across learning aims.

Dealing with late completion of assignments

Students must have a clear understanding of the centre policy on completing assignments by the deadlines that you give them. Students may be given authorised extensions for legitimate reasons, such as illness at the time of submission, in line with your centre policies.

For assessment to be fair, it is important that students are all assessed in the same way and that some students are not advantaged by having additional time or the opportunity to learn from others. Therefore, students who do not complete assignments by your planned deadline or the authorised extension deadline may not have the opportunity to subsequently resubmit.

If you accept a late completion by a student, then the assignment should be assessed normally when it is submitted using the relevant assessment criteria.

Issuing assessment decisions and feedback

Once the assessment team has completed the assessment process for an assignment, the outcome is a formal assessment decision. This is recorded formally and reported to students.

The information given to the student:

- must show the formal decision and how it has been reached, indicating how or where criteria have been met
- must not provide feedback on how to improve evidence
- must be validated by an Internal Verifier (IV) before it is given to the student.

Resubmission of improved evidence

An assignment provides the final assessment for the relevant learning aims and is normally a final assessment decision, except where the Lead IV approves one opportunity to resubmit improved evidence based on the completed PSAB.

The Lead IV has the responsibility to make sure that resubmission is operated fairly. This means:

- checking that a student can be reasonably expected to perform better through a second submission, for example that the student has not performed as expected
- making sure that giving a further opportunity can be done in such a way that it does not give an unfair advantage over other students, for example through the opportunity to take account of feedback given to other students
- checking that the assessor considers that the student will be able to provide improved evidence without further guidance and that the original evidence submitted remains valid.

Once an assessment decision has been given to the student, the resubmission opportunity must have a deadline within 15 working days in the same academic year.

A resubmission opportunity must not be provided where students:

- have not completed the assignment by the deadline without the centre's agreement
- have submitted work that is not authentic.

Retake of internal assessment

A student who has not achieved the level of performance required to pass the relevant learning aims after resubmission of an assignment may be offered a single retake opportunity that may only be achieved at a pass. The retake can be of a task or subset of the same Pearson Set Assignment Brief version originally taken by the student,with evidence in a new or revised form. The deadline for submission of the retake must fall within the same academic year.

The Lead IV must only authorise a retake of an assignment in exceptional circumstances where they believe it is necessary, appropriate and fair to do so. For further information on offering a retake opportunity, you should refer to the *BTEC Centre Guide to Internal Assessment*. We provide information on assignments and retakes on our website (https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/support-for-you/quality-nominees.html).

Planning and record keeping

For internal processes to be effective, an assessment team needs to be well organised and keep effective records. The centre will also work closely with us so that we can quality assure that national standards are being met. This process gives stakeholders confidence in the assessment approach.

The Lead IV must have an assessment plan, produced as a spreadsheet.
When producing a plan, the assessment team may wish to consider:

- the time required for training and standardisation of the assessment team
- the time available to undertake teaching and carry out assessment, taking account of when students may complete external assessments and when quality assurance will take place
- the completion dates for different assignments
- who is acting as IV for each assignment and the date by which the assignment needs to be verified
- setting an approach to sampling assessor decisions though internal verification that covers all assignments, assessors and a range of students
- how to manage the assessment and verification of students' work so that they can be given formal decisions promptly
- how resubmission opportunities can be scheduled.

The Lead IV will also maintain records of assessment undertaken. The key records are:

- student authentication declarations
- assessor decisions on assignments, with feedback given to students
- verification of assessment decisions.

Examples of records and further information are given on our website (https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/support-for-you/quality-nominees.html).

3 Administrative arrangements

Introduction

This section focuses on the administrative requirements for delivering a BTEC qualification. It will be of value to Quality Nominees, Lead IVs, Programme Leaders and Examinations Officers.

Student registration and entry

Shortly after students start the programme of learning, you need to make sure that they are registered for the qualification and that appropriate arrangements are made for internal and external assessment. You need to refer to the *Information Manual* for information on making registrations for the qualification and entries for external assessments.

Students can be formally assessed only for a qualification on which they are registered. If students' intended qualifications change, for example if a student decides to choose a different pathway specialism, then the centre must transfer the student appropriately.

Access to assessment

Both internal and external assessments need to be administered carefully to ensure that all students are treated fairly, and that results and certification are issued on time to allow students to progress to chosen progression opportunities.

Our *Equity, diversity and inclusion in Pearson qualifications and related services* policy requires that all students should have equal opportunity to access our qualifications and assessments, and that our qualifications are awarded in a way that is fair to every student. https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/support-topics/understanding-our-qualifications/policies-for-centres-learners-and-employees.html.

We are committed to making sure that:

- students with a protected characteristic are not, when they are undertaking one of our qualifications, disadvantaged in comparison to students who do not share that characteristic
- all students achieve the recognition they deserve for undertaking a qualification and that this achievement can be compared fairly to the achievement of their peers.

Further information on access arrangements can be found in the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) document *Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments*.

Administrative arrangements for internal assessment

Records

You are required to retain records of assessment for each student. Records should include assessments taken, decisions reached and any adjustments or appeals. Further information can be found in the Information Manual. We may ask to audit your records so they must be retained as specified.

Reasonable adjustments to assessment

A reasonable adjustment is one that is made before a student takes an assessment to ensure that they have fair access to demonstrate the requirements of the assessment. You are able to make reasonable adjustments to internal assessments to take account of the needs of individual students. In most cases this can be achieved through a defined time extension or by adjusting the format of evidence. You may not substitute alternative forms of evidence to that required in a unit or omit the application of any assessment criteria to judge attainment. We can advise you if you are uncertain as to whether an adjustment is fair and reasonable. You need to plan for time to make adjustments if necessary.

Further details on how to make reasonable adjustments for students with protected characteristics are given on our website in the document *Supplementary guidance for reasonable adjustment and special consideration in vocational internal assessments*. https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/support-topics/understanding-our-qualifications/policies-for-centres-learners-and-employees.html.

Special consideration

Special consideration is given after an assessment has taken place for students who have been affected by adverse circumstances, such as illness. You must operate special consideration in line with our policy (see previous paragraph). Pearson can consider applications for special consideration in line with the policy.

Appeals against assessment

Your centre must have a policy for dealing with appeals from students. These appeals may relate to assessment decisions being incorrect or assessment not being conducted fairly. The first step in such a policy could be a consideration of the evidence by a Lead IV or other member of the programme team. The assessment plan should allow time for potential appeals after assessment decisions have been given to students. If there is an appeal by a student, you must document the appeal and its resolution. Students have a final right of appeal to Pearson but only if the procedures that you have put in place have not been followed. Further details are given in the document *Enquiries and appeals about Pearson vocational qualifications and end point assessment policy*.

Administrative arrangements for external assessment

Entries and resits

For information on the timing of assessment and entries, please refer to the annual examinations timetable on our website.

Access arrangements requests

Access arrangements are agreed with Pearson before an assessment. They allow students with special educational needs, disabilities or temporary injuries to:

- access the assessment
- show what they know and can do without changing the demands of the assessment.

Access arrangements should always be processed at the time of registration. Students will then know what type of arrangements are available in place for them.

Granting reasonable adjustments

For external assessment, a reasonable adjustment is one that we agree to make for an individual student. A reasonable adjustment is defined for the individual student and informed by the list of available access arrangements.

Whether an adjustment will be considered reasonable will depend on a number of factors, to include:

- the needs of the student with the disability
- the effectiveness of the adjustment
- the cost of the adjustment, and
- the likely impact of the adjustment on the student with the disability and other students.

Adjustment may be judged unreasonable and not approved if it involves unreasonable costs, timeframes or affects the integrity of the assessment.

Special consideration requests

Special consideration is an adjustment made to a student's mark or grade after an external assessment to reflect temporary injury, illness or other indisposition at the time of the assessment. An adjustment is made only if the impact on the student is such that it is reasonably likely to have had a material effect on that student being able to demonstrate attainment in the assessment.

Centres are required to notify us promptly of any students who they believe have been adversely affected and request that we give special consideration. Further information can be found in the special requirements section on our website.

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Conducting external assessments

Centres must make arrangements for the secure delivery of external assessments. External assessments for BTEC qualifications include examinations, set tasks and performance.

Each external assessment has a defined degree of control under which it must take place. Some external assessments may have more than one part and each part may have a different degree of control. We define degrees of control as follows.

Level of control

All external assessments must be completed under high control. This is the completion of assessment in formal invigilated examination conditions.

Further information on responsibilities for conducting external assessment is given in the document *Instructions for Conducting External Assessments (ICEA)*, available on our website.

Dealing with malpractice in assessment

'Malpractice' refers to acts that undermine the integrity and validity of assessment, the certification of qualifications and/or may damage the authority of those responsible for delivering the assessment and certification.

Pearson does not tolerate actual or attempted malpractice by students, centre staff or centres in connection with Pearson qualifications. Pearson may impose sanctions on students, centre staff or centres where malpractice or attempted malpractice has been proven.

Malpractice may occur or be suspected in relation to any unit or type of assessment within a qualification. For further details on malpractice and advice on preventing malpractice by students, please see Pearson's *Centre Guidance: Dealing with Malpractice*, available on our website.

Centres are required to take steps to prevent malpractice and to assist with investigating instances of suspected malpractice. Students must be given information that explains what malpractice is and how suspected incidents will be dealt with by the centre. The *Centre Guidance: Dealing with Malpractice* document gives full information on the actions we expect you to take.

Pearson may conduct investigations if we believe a centre is failing to conduct assessments according to our policies. The above document gives further information, examples, and details the sanctions that may be imposed.

In the interests of students and centre staff, centres need to respond effectively and openly to all requests relating to an investigation into an incident of suspected malpractice.

Student malpractice

Cases of suspected student malpractice in external assessments must be reported to Pearson immediately. Heads of Centre should complete *JCQ Form M1* and submit this along with all supporting documentation (signed statements from the student, invigilator, copies of evidence, etc) to our Investigations Processing team at candidatemalpractice@pearson.com.

Cases of suspected student malpractice in internal assessments must be reported to Pearson if the student has signed the declaration of authentication. Heads of Centre should complete *JCQ Form M1* and submit this along with all supporting documentation to our Investigations Processing team at candidatemalpractice@pearson.com. Where students have not completed a declaration of authentication the incident does not need to be reported and centres should follow their internal malpractice/academic misconduct policy in resolving the matter. The responsibility for determining any appropriate sanctions on students lies with Pearson.

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Students must be informed at the earliest opportunity of the specific allegation and the centre's malpractice policy, including the right of appeal. Students found guilty of malpractice may be disqualified from the qualification for which they have been entered with Pearson.

Failure to report malpractice constitutes staff or centre malpractice.

Teacher/centre malpractice

The head of centre is required to inform Pearson's Investigations team of any incident of suspected malpractice (which includes maladministration) by centre staff, before any investigation is undertaken. The head of centre should inform the Investigations team by submitting a *JCQ Form M2* (downloadable from www.jcq.org.uk/malpractice) with supporting documentation to pqsmalpractice@pearson.com. Where Pearson receives allegations of malpractice from other sources (for example Pearson staff, anonymous informants), the Investigations team will conduct the investigation directly or may ask the head of centre to assist.

Pearson reserves the right in cases of suspected malpractice to withhold the issuing of results/certificates while an investigation is in progress. Depending on the outcome of the investigation, results and/or certificates may not be released or they may be withheld.

You should be aware that Pearson may need to suspend certification when undertaking investigations, audits and quality assurances processes. You will be notified within a reasonable period of time if this occurs.

Sanctions and appeals

Where malpractice is proven, we may impose sanctions such as:

- mark reduction for affected assessments
- disqualification from the qualification
- debarment from registration for Pearson qualifications for a period of time.

If we are concerned about your centre's quality procedures we may impose sanctions such as:

- requiring centres to create an improvement action plan
- requiring staff members to receive further training
- placing temporary suspensions on certification of students
- placing temporary suspensions on registration of students
- debarring staff members or the centre from delivering Pearson qualifications
- suspending or withdrawing centre approval status.

The centre will be notified if any of these apply.

Pearson has established procedures for considering appeals against sanctions arising from malpractice. Appeals against a decision made by Pearson will normally be accepted only from the head of centre (on behalf of students and/or members or staff) and from individual members (in respect of a decision taken against them personally). Further information on appeals can be found in the JCQ appeals booklet (https://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/appeals).

Certification and results

Once a student has completed all the required components for a qualification, even if final results for external assessments have not been issued, then the centre can claim certification for the student, provided that quality assurance has been successfully completed. For the relevant procedures please refer to our *Information Manual*. You can use the information provided on qualification grading to check overall qualification grades.

Results issue

After the external assessment session, student results will be issued to centres. The result will be in the form of a grade. You should be prepared to discuss performance with students, making use of the information we provide and post-results services.

Post-assessment services

Once results for external assessments are issued, you may find that the student has failed to achieve the qualification or to attain an anticipated grade. It is possible to transfer or reopen registration in some circumstances. *The Information Manual* gives further information.

Changes to qualification requests

Where a student who has taken a qualification wants to resit an externally assessed unit to improve their qualification grade, you firstly need to decline their overall qualification grade. You may decline the grade before the certificate is issued. For a student receiving their results in August, you should decline the grade by the end of September if the student intends to resit an external assessment.

Additional documents to support centre administration

As an approved centre you must ensure that all staff delivering, assessing and administering the qualifications have access to this documentation. These documents are reviewed annually and are reissued if updates are required.

- *Alternative Academic Qualifications Guide to Quality Assurance*: this will set out how we will carry out quality assurance of standards and how you need to work with us to achieve successful outcomes.
- *Information Manual*: this gives procedures for registering students for qualifications, transferring registrations, entering for external assessments and claiming certificates.
- *Principal Examiners' Reports*: these are produced after each series for each external assessment and give feedback on the overall performance of students in response to tasks or questions set.
- *Instructions for the Conduct of External Assessments (ICEA)*: this explains our requirements for the effective administration of external assessments, such as invigilation and submission of materials.
- *Regulatory policies*: our regulatory policies are integral to our approach and explain how we meet internal and regulatory requirements. We review the regulated policies annually to ensure that they remain fit for purpose.

  Policies related to each BTEC National qualification include:

  - adjustments for candidates with disabilities and learning difficulties, access arrangements and reasonable adjustments for general and vocational qualifications
  - age of students
  - centre guidance for dealing with malpractice
  - recognition of prior learning and process.

This list is not exhaustive and a full list of our regulatory policies can be found on our website.

4 Quality assurance

Centre and qualification approval

As part of the approval process, your centre must make sure that the resource requirements listed below are in place before offering the qualification.

- Centres must have appropriate physical resources (for example, equipment, IT, learning materials, teaching rooms) to support the delivery and assessment of the qualification.
- Staff involved in the assessment process must have relevant expertise and/or occupational experience.
- There must be systems in place to ensure continuing professional development for staff delivering the qualification.
- Centres must have in place appropriate health and safety policies relating to the use of equipment by students.
- Centres must deliver the qualification in accordance with current equality legislation.
- Centres should refer to the teacher guidance section in individual units to check for any specific resources required.

Continuing quality assurance and standards verification

On an annual basis, we will produce the Alternative Academic Qualifications Guide to Quality Assurance. It will contain detailed guidance on the quality processes required to underpin robust assessment and internal verification.

The key principles of quality assurance are that:

- a centre delivering BTEC programmes must be an approved centre, and must have approval for the programmes or groups of programmes that it is delivering
- the centre agrees, as part of gaining approval, to abide by specific terms and conditions around the effective delivery and quality assurance of assessment; it must abide by these conditions throughout the period of delivery
- Pearson makes available to approved centres a range of materials and opportunities intended to exemplify the processes required for effective assessment, and examples of effective standards. Approved centres must use the materials and services to ensure that all staff delivering BTEC qualifications keep up to date with the guidance on assessment
- an approved centre must follow agreed protocols for standardisation of assessors and verifiers, for the planning, monitoring and recording of assessment processes, and for dealing with special circumstances, appeals and malpractice.

The approach of quality-assured assessment is through a partnership between an approved centre and Pearson. We will make sure that each centre follows best practice and employs appropriate technology to support quality-assurance processes, where practicable. We work to support centres and seek to make sure that our quality-assurance processes do not place undue bureaucratic processes on centres. We monitor and support centres in the effective operation of assessment and quality assurance.

The methods we use to do this for BTEC Level 3 include:

- making sure that all centres complete appropriate declarations at the time of approval
- undertaking approval visits to centres
- making sure that centres have effective teams of assessors and verifiers who are trained to undertake assessment
- standards verification, through sampling of assessments, student work and associated documentation
- reviewing Assessment Plans for delivering and quality assuring BTEC programmes, for example making sure that synoptic units are placed appropriately in the order of delivery of the programme.

Centres that do not fully address and maintain rigorous approaches to delivering, assessing and quality assurance cannot seek certification for individual programmes or for all BTEC Level 3 programmes. An approved centre must make certification claims only when authorised by us and strictly in accordance with requirements for reporting.

Centres that do not comply with remedial action plans, where required, may have their approval to deliver qualifications removed.

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For information about Pearson Qualifications, including Pearson Edexcel and BTEC qualifications visit qualifications.pearson.com

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